

Popular Culture and Me

When I first began thinking about what popular culture artifact I would choose to write this essay about, I wanted to pick something that I didn't necessarily value as one of my favorite artistic creations; but one that had a profound impact on me. In brainstorming for this essay, I was unsure if I wanted to write about a movie, a film, or a book; however, when I took a deeper look into what elements of my life have been developed by certain cultural artifacts, I could not think of a better piece of American culture than the film K.I.D.S.. In this essay, I will discuss why this film had such a lasting impact on my worldview and the way I identify myself. ✓

K.I.D.S. was released in 1994, and has since gained critical acclaim for its ultra-explicit, rigid depiction of what many American teenagers were engaging in during the mid-90's. The film revolves around a group of delinquent teenage skaters who participate in heavy drug use and sexual misbehavior. One could argue that there are multiple protagonists in the film because it does a great job showing social dynamics among both young men and young women through the scenarios the film provides. From smoking marijuana, stealing alcohol, and skipping class to getting in fights, running from police, and having unprotected sex; the main characters show how kids are so susceptible to getting themselves into trouble but are also not completely capable of dealing with the consequences or having any concern for those consequences. ✓

Taking place in New York City, the film focuses on urban teen culture and some of the effects that the city environment has on them. Drugs are more than accessible, streets and parks are a means to vandalize and destroy public property, and parties are thrown every night at

whoever's apartment whose parents weren't home. The film is such an eye opening experience because it serves as a wake-up call for kids and parents alike, and is a lifesaver for many kids who can relate to the lifestyles shown. That was the case in my relationship with the film as it was a more powerful motivator to avoid drugs, alcohol, and dangerous sexual behavior than any anti-drug or safe sex video I ever watched in school. Most kids are not like the kids in the film, and never will be; but they will be exposed to some of the elements of delinquent behavior at some point in their lives. Some kids fall through the cracks of social progression, and become prone to the crippling effects of drug abuse and sexual deviancy which seemingly casts them into a sea of oblivion. ✓

K.I.D.S. affected me in a way that made me look at my own delinquency and what it could result in. In highschool, I related to much of what the characters in the film were doing and how they identified themselves because I was exposed to elements of drug abuse and destructive behavior at a young age. I would always hangout with older kids in my neighborhood who were addicted to a myriad of drugs who introduced me to the skater lifestyle. Growing up in Huntington Beach, California, I basically had no choice but to learn how to skate which exposed me to a more unconventional way of interpreting the world around me due to the type of community I identified with. It seemed like we had to make a statement towards "the man" and our parents generation; proclaiming that we were different and it didn't matter if we were worse off. We simply didn't care about our future or reputation. All we cared about was getting high, getting drunk, getting laid, or getting money to a certain extent. ✓

The film made me take a look in the mirror after watching it, being that I was sixteen when I first saw it. It made my friends and I talk about the behavior we expressed but were

reluctant to admit. K.I.D.S. influenced the way I looked at the rest of the world by showing me how common our actions were with kids all over the world, and especially in America. I used to think that we were the only kids doing what we were doing, but the film showed me otherwise. I began to perceive my generation as a lost, depressed generation because of societal pressures we faced paired with the way society perceives the way we acted. The raw nature and bleak attitude the film possesses provided a seemingly unbiased view of how much the world cares about it's youth. It provided me with a new paradigm of my culture that stressed self-judgement and identity of self which has evolved with me as I have gotten older. ✓

In regards to how the film appealed to larger society, it was one of the first teen films in its era to focus on the more unspeakable behaviors and lifestyles of young adults and teenagers. The film highlighted the AIDS outbreak, the crack epidemic, and social injustices that were complex issues during the nineties. It helped give those affected an identity or presence in the grand culture as a whole which validated the problems related to those issues. The film does not convey a clear message or provide solutions to the problems it provokes thought towards; but really tries to show a realistic look into life as a young person and the challenges they have within their own culture. As time has passed, the film has been considered more of a cult-classic, while also being regarded as a quasi-documentary to adolescent delinquency. ✓

In conclusion, I learned so much about myself because of the way the film changed my perspective about drug use, music, sex, religion, and the future. I wouldn't recommend the film as a great watch or a way to entertain yourself for ninety minutes; but I would recommend people watch it to open their eyes to the world of skaters and young people on a much broader scale.

10 great job - really interesting reading of the film, particularly in conjunction with your own experience in Huntington Beach. Have you seen the show Euphoria on HBO? It reminds me of an updated Kids in tone and subject matter.

One form of pop cultural production that has shaped my identity today is music. Not all music moves me though, but an artist that has, is none other than Kid Cudi. Kid Cudi, a Cleveland native, is a rapper/hip hop artist. Kid Cudi's discography is so different compared to most rappers which is why he is such an influential figure in the rap game. He refuses to stick to one genre and tries many different things when it comes to music. In fact, his first album "Man on the Moon: End of Day" was so influential, that media outlets such as Genius have made videos discussing the album and how "he changed hip-hop". ✓

I don't want to sound like a fanboy and say Kid Cudi changed my life but he definitely changed the way I see certain things through his music. A major theme in Kid Cudi's music is mental health. Kid Cudi has been open about fighting depression ever since his father passed away when he was young. I believe he's one of the first few rappers to be open about mental health in his music and that is also a big reason he's so influential. Kid Cudi is not my favorite artist but his second album, "Man on the Moon II: The Legend of Mr. Rager" is my favorite album of all time. I would argue that, that album is his darkest album but it's amazing. When I'm listening to that album and I'm feeling blue, it's almost as if he's talking to me and telling me everything is going to be ok. The personal message I get from his music is that we all have our own things going on and even though sometimes it could be overwhelming, we just have to fight through it and in the end we will be ok. I believe this message comes out even more powerful because of his voice. He's one of the few rappers who could actually sing and his first album had a lot singing which in the rap world at the time, was not all too common. His voice is so nice, that even him humming is appealing to people including myself. In fact, his humming appeals so ✓

much to people, that there's been memes made of how good his humming is and it is quite amusing. I believe that his music helps me personally when I'm in a slump and I know for a fact his music has done the same not just to fans but to other artists as well. Even superstar Travis Scott has said in an interview before, "There would be no Travis Scott if it wasn't for [Cudi]". Some people will even say that Kid Cudi saved their life at a point and that just shows what an impact he has had outside the music world.

Another reason why Cudi has changed my view on certain things is because of his will to try out new things whether it be his music or even fashion. He came out with an album in 2015 called "Speedin' Bullet to Heaven" and it was a more rock/alternative album. He got a lot of negative feedback from it and I personally did not enjoy it when I first heard it either. He did not mind though, as he went on Twitter and told everyone not to expect the same type of music as his first two successful albums. That is why Cudi is such an iconic figure to me because he's always in his own lane and isn't afraid to experiment with new things no matter the outcome. I could argue that "Speedin' Bullet to Heaven" was actually ahead of its time because now when I go back and listen to it, I actually enjoy it. I always use that example when it comes to the things I do, whether it be my music taste or the way I dress. Kid Cudi pushes the message of not caring what other people think and to just do whatever makes you happy. I feel it is such a cliché thing to say but I feel when there's a figure as big as Kid Cudi, people will take that advice. I also mentioned how even the way he dresses was different from typical rappers back when he first came into the music scene. I believe he was one of the first big artists to wear skinny jeans compared to other rappers with their baggy pants. Kanye West has even publicly given Cudi his credit for bringing skinny jeans into the rap game. This is a huge deal because in the hip-hop world especially, masculinity is all over. Kid Cudi even raps about how people used to call him

gay for the way he dressed and now every rapper has tighter jeans than the ladies they're seen with. He recently tweeted that he would be open to dressing in drag someday as well and got huge support from his fans. This just shows Cudi really does not care about what anyone thinks and will literally do anything he wants to.

Another reason why he has had such an impact on me is because of how much of a nice character he is. I've had the honor of meeting him before [!]₈ and he's so humble and energetic. He's always willing to take a picture with fans and even bought out a room in theatres to watch movies with his fans which I have gone to twice. The way he carries himself sometimes takes me aback because of his history of fighting his depression. It was devastating to hear Cudi checking into rehab a few years back because of abuse and suicidal thoughts. When I heard that, I couldn't imagine how someone who has impacted so many people, was not able to help himself. I was lucky enough to see his first post-rehab performance and he looked like he was living life again and that is why I love Cudi. He has his own battles but he always pushes through it and comes back smiling. He always talks with his fans during performances as well and always relates to them telling them things will be alright. ✓

✓ Kid Cudi is not just an influential artist, but an overall good character and the type of artist fans should look up to. Not only has his music helped me through difficult times, but also many other fans across the globe. He showed me that stepping out of my own comfort zone is completely fine regardless what anyone thinks and I don't think there has been any other artist with that much of an impact on my life. There is just no denying the impact Kid Cudi has had in and out of the music world

10 Great job. I think it's a great point that Kid Cudi was talking about mental health + depression way before it was "cool"/acceptable like today. Plus I never thought about the ways he transgresses masculinity/gender norms. He's a role model for a lot of people.

Pop Culture & Me Essay Part I

If I were to choose a single brand to sponsor my life, without a doubt or even a second of hesitation I would select Nike. The Swoosh has had a significant impact on my life which began in my childhood. From a very young age I was exposed to sneakers by my Nike-obsessed father and grew to become a full-fledged "sneakerhead" myself. The influence of Nike goes well beyond my own passions and reveals itself in various aspects of everyday life and pop culture. From sports, fashion, movies, and even music Nike has anchored itself in a variety of cultures and immortalized the Swoosh. ✓

Nike is a sportswear conglomerate which produces and sells athletic apparel and sneakers. The Nike Swoosh, Tick, and Check are all names for the iconic Nike logo which is arguably as recognizable as the symbol of the cross. Aside from the unmistakable Nike logo, Nike is also famous for their widely popular slogan: "Just Do It.". With this slogan, Nike promotes an active lifestyle and an aggressive go-getter attitude. With thousands of stores spanning hundreds of countries across the globe, Nike is a worldwide phenomenon which continues to influence various cultures with their products and Nike "lifestyle".

haha
The saying "I make shoe contact before eye contact" is common amongst sneakerheads and is very much a phrase I follow. The avoidance of eye contact may stem partially from my introverted personality but also because by looking at a person's shoes you can often infer things about them without ever having spoken to them. The shoes a person wears can often indicate

things about themselves such as their personality, profession, interests, and also their financial status. You can read a person's soul through their soles. Because my dad was raised in the poorest of circumstances in the Philippines, wearing Nike was absolutely a status symbol. After escaping poverty and becoming a nurse in the United States, it would only make sense for him to give his family the lavish things he couldn't afford in his youth. Thus, growing up I was given plenty of sneakers and taught the importance of material goods as an indicator of status. My family would never let me walk outside wearing a beat pair of shoes as that is something which "only poor people would do". As shallow as it may be, to judge others based upon materialistic things such as their clothing is a primary reaction I have upon meeting someone. Despite this immediate judgement, I understand that clothing cannot fully (or at all) determine someone's character. After all, I'd be a fool to automatically assume that all men who wear Vans Old Skools drive lowered civics and vape in the parking lot.

✓ signs
+ symbols
in shoe
culture

In the larger picture of society, Nike has served a prominent role in many aspects of culture ranging from sports, fashion, films, and even music. Ultimately, the rise of Nike has led to a massive consumer base which places priority in material wealth above all. Nike has served as a status symbol globally and is apparent in their high price points and high sneaker resell prices which drive up exclusivity and limit purchasing to those who can freely drop hundreds of dollars on a pair of shoes. With the release of streetwear designer collaborations such as the Off-White Nike collaboration known as "The Ten" the status of Nike sneakers as a luxury item has only gone up. Songs such as "Nikes On My Feet" by Mac Miller and "Tip Toe Wing In My Jawwdinz" by Riff Raff glorify Nike and increase the brand's fame. Sports and movies are no exception to this as well as both hold massive platforms in the media and allow for the promotion of the swoosh. The Nike Air Mag featured in *Back to the Future* is considered to be a

holy grail amongst sneakerheads with pairs going upwards of \$12,000. By having regular exposure to Nike branded goods in all sorts of media consumers are led to believe that Nike is the norm and must buy their products in order to fit in. To not own Nike products would be considered taboo and is something I've berated my Adidas loving friend for. ✓

Nike has consistently been a major part of my life and is very much a brand which shaped me as a person. Nike has shaped society as well in that it is heavily referenced in various forms of media resulting in the creation of the idea that everyone must own Nike in order to fit in. Though I'm uncertain whether to perceive the consumerist culture of America as a good or a bad thing, what I am certain of is that the Air Jordan 1 is the most comfortable high top sneaker ever created. ✓

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Good job. —

There is def
a fascinating
sneakerhead culture

that goes back
decades and has
many layers. I like
how you situated
this in your own life.

Have you seen the
"COMPLEX GOES SNEAKER
SHOPPING" series on
YouTube?